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Pakistan's Zia: 'Shah Syndrome' Revived

Several weeks ago, I warned that the United States was inviting another Iran-style disaster in the Middle East by cozying up to Pakistan's hated dictator, Gen. Muhammad Zia ul-Haq.

Since then, according to the latest intelligence reports, the situation has deteriorated inside Pakistan. Yet the Reagan administration, instead of backing away from this potential nightmare, is planning to commit the United States even more deeply to Zia's unpopular, repressive regime.

Secret foreign intelligence cables reviewed by my associate Jack Mitchell reveal that the "Shah Syndrome" is already beginning to materialize in Pakistan: American citizens have been assaulted in broad daylight on the streets of the country's largest cities — for the sole reason that they are identified with the United States, which is supporting their detested dictator.

Surrounded by shameless yes-men, Zia has delayed three times the free elections he promised; has instituted unprecedented martial law and has arrested and tortured thousands. He is caught in a vicious circle of his own making: The more he cracks down on his countrymen, the more unpopular he is and the more vocal his opponents become. This then causes him to tighten the screws still more.

But though Zia sits precariously on a powder keg, White House policy-makers seem determined to provide

him with the latest in military technology. The reasons are the same as those advanced to justify support of the shah: The United States needs a "dependable ally" in the region to confront the Soviet Union, and Saudi Arabia must be protected to assure a continued flow of oil.

But diplomatic sources warn that time may be running out on Zia, just as it did for the shah. Pakistan's highest judges have refused to go along with the general's kangaroo courts, in which defendants are convicted without benefit of witnesses, lawyers or appeals. Lawyers have also shown their distaste for the dictatorship by openly supporting prominent colleagues who have been arrested on trumped-up charges and tortured.

The recent burning of a DC10 at the Karachi airport was officially termed an accident, but government insiders say it was sabotage.

Still the repression continues. Newspapers carry photos of floggings, and the possibility has been discussed of punishing adultery by publicly stoning transgressors to death.

Education is deteriorating; Zia and his generals have closed down schools as a means of curbing opposition. The government has also increased censorship of the media.

Yet it is this hated dictatorship that the White House seems determined to identify with, trying to prop up Zia's shaky regime with hundreds of mil-

lions of dollars in military aid. If there are dissenting views in the administration, they have been effectively silenced by Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr.

The really sad part of this is that the administration's policy may actually help to achieve exactly the opposite of its intended goal: By helping Zia, we could drive the opposition, which includes virtually all political parties, and the people of Pakistan into Soviet arms. That would make Zia's downfall doubly disastrous for the United States.

Footnote: The Reagan administration has tried to distinguish between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, but Zia has even been denounced by former supporters for flouting the nation's constitution. State Department spokesmen refused to comment.